



Frantz Fanon, 1925 - 1961

We must not voodoo the people

In the well-known chapter from “The Wretched of the Earth” called “Pitfalls of National Consciousness”, Frantz Fanon says things like:

“In its beginnings, the national bourgeoisie of the colonial countries identifies itself with the decadence of the bourgeoisie of the West. We need not think that it is jumping ahead; it is in fact beginning at the end. It is already senile before it has come to know the petulance, the fearlessness or the will to succeed of youth.”

After such denunciations, it is quite easy to overlook the more positive, last third of this essay, in which Fanon the freedom

fighter and psychologist seeks to prescribe what the newly-independent ex-colonial country, which he refers to as the under-developed country, should do; and this mostly has to do with education.

For example:

“Everything can be explained to the people, on the single condition that you really want them to understand.”

*“Now, political education means opening their minds, awakening them, and allowing the birth of their intelligence; as Cesaire said, it is 'to invent souls'. To educate the masses politically does not mean, cannot mean making a political speech. What it means is to try, relentlessly and passionately, to teach the masses that everything depends on them; that if we stagnate it is their responsibility, and that if we go forward it is due to them too, that there is no such thing as a demiurge, that there is no famous man who will take the responsibility for everything, but that the demiurge is the people themselves and **the magic hands are finally only the hands of the people.**”*

*“The collective struggle presupposes collective responsibility at the base and collegiate responsibility at the top. Yes; everybody will have to be compromised in the fight for the common good. No one has clean hands; **there are no innocents and no onlookers.** We*

all have dirty hands; we are all soiling them in the swamps of our country and in the terrifying emptiness of our brains. Every onlooker is either a coward or a traitor.”

*“The duty of those at the head of the movement is to have the masses behind them. Allegiance presupposes awareness and understanding of the mission which has to be fulfilled; in short, an intellectual position, however embryonic. **We must not voodoo the people**, nor dissolve them in emotion and confusion.”*

*“To educate the masses politically is to make the totality of **the nation a reality to each citizen**. It is to make the history of the nation part of the personal experience of each of its citizens.”*

Here are some words from the Conclusion to Fanon’s “The Wretched of the Earth”:

“Let us try to create the whole man, whom Europe has been incapable of bringing to triumphant birth.

“All the elements of a solution to the great problems of humanity have, at different times, existed in European thought. But Europeans have not carried out in practice the mission which fell to them, which consisted of bringing their whole weight to bear violently upon these elements, of modifying their arrangement and their nature, of changing them and, finally, of bringing

the problem of mankind to an infinitely higher plane.

“Today, we are present at the stasis of Europe.

“Two centuries ago, a former European colony decided to catch up with Europe. It succeeded so well that the United States of America became a monster, in which the taints, the sickness and the inhumanity of Europe have grown to appalling dimensions.

“Comrades, have we not other work to do than to create a third Europe?”

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Frantz Fanon, Pitfalls of National Consciousness, 1963, Part 3.](#)
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